Whether history is a mere half-truth dependent upon
the writer's attitude and interpretation, or history is truth
infinite and independent - the question has not been fully answerd.
Thus, it will be an unnecessary task to examine 'The Glimpses
of World History' from the standpoint of historical correctness,-
as Jawaharlal Nehru himself says, 'I have given you the barest
outline ; this is not history ; they are just fleeting glimpses
of our long past.' Some scholars and reviewers have endeavoured
to compare the author of The Glimpses of World History with other
noted historians of the origin, growth and decay of human civiliza­
tions on this earth. Comparisons are not always very helpful
in scientific evaluation of writings,- historical, political or
literary, for such writings must be examined and judged on their
own intrinsic worth in terms of some accepted norm or criterion.
Written in prison, the book had to bear certain limitations as
the author had not the advantage of reference libraries and cons­
sultants. And, in particular, the author does not seem to have
taken up any well-planned project to write 'World History' in the
historical sense. 'I do not claim to be a historian'- wrote Nehru
in January, 1934 as a preface to the First Edition of his letters
to be published in a book form. But there is no denying the fact
that Nehru read extensively inspite of handicaps and restrictions
of prison life. He made notes of the books that he read. And then:
"My note-books grew in number and they came to my rescue when I

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when I started writing. Other books of course helped me greatly, among them inevitably, H.G. Wells's *Outline of History*. Primarily, therefore, he wanted to pass on to his daughter, then in her early teens, dependable and correct information about civilization from the earliest days of man's march towards manhood.

Even then, comparisons are often made by scholars with a view to establishing the historical classicism of *The Glimpses of World History*. V.N. Chhibber reviewing Nehru as a writer in particular reference to *The Glimpses of World History* writes thus:

"He appears as a historian giving vivid details of the panorama of world history - the great journey of man from the primitive age to the modern times. ... ... ... On a comparative estimate we find that this work of Nehru is in succession of H.G. Wells' *Outline of History* which inspired him. Wells' work is more scientific and less human while Nehru's is more a human document than a formal book of history. Then we come to Professor Arnold Toynbee whose *Study of History* is indeed a monumental work. While Nehru is ahead of Wells, Toynbee is still a step further. Wells, Nehru and Toynbee is a historical process in itself where the successor steals the show from the predecessor. Later on in this line appears John Bowl's *A New Outline of World History* which attempts to present a balanced view of eastern and western histories. But Nehru's passionate creative passages in the *Glimpses* have made it a romantic history of the world."

Contd...
History as such is a non-specialist's subject for Jawaharlal Nehru; he has been very far from historical science. Any attempt at placing Nehru in line with H.G. Wells, Toynbee and Bowle as a historian will be an attempt at the futile, for the image will be a superimposition on an alien base. Rather, Jawaharlal Nehru has utilised interesting historical material spread over a time space of nearly three thousand years upon this earth with the artistry of a creative literary writer to bring out the 'Kaleidoscopic succession of comedies and tragedies of unpredictable circumstance upon this vast theatre through which the thrilling voyage of discovery of the uncharted future goes on and on in every age for more power, and wealth, more peace and happiness. The long account, surcharged with deep romanticism, however turns out to be a saga of men of might and glory now gone into oblivion, of nations ruined by conflicts and clashes, of the rise and fall of empires, the liquidations of dynasties, of the emergence of new belief and ideas, of the marvels of constructions in peacetime and destructions in wars and revolutions. And through this unending rambling of the wheels of eventful time the author betrays his optimism in respect of a new world of beauty and peace and happiness to emerge from the disorders and catastrophes of the present-day world. Thus, a great poetic quest is contained in The Glimpses of World History, and in its pages one can even listen to the murmurings of a dreamer on a poet in his varying moods, far removed from the vicissitudes of the binding environments. A great artistic skill in the composition of the epical book lies in the autobiographical elements in the

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the numerous letters written to his daughter by the great author, and these are window-like openings through which he lets in fresh air, sunshine, moonlight or even stormy whirls, and thus the rigid objectivity of dead history is delivered by an almost infectious subjectivity. And on this point the most correct assessment has perhaps been made by Nehru himself. "Physical inactivity leads to introspection and varying moods. I am afraid these changing moods are very apparent in the course of these letters, and the method of treatment is not the objective one of a historian." To drive the point home a reference may be made to certain parts of the contents. The first 50 pages of the book deal with the ancient times, the following being the sub-titles on the contents page: The old civilizations and our Inheritance; the Hellenes; the Greek City-States; Empires in Western Asia; the Village Republics of Ancient India; A thousand years of China; Persia and Greece; The Glory that was Hellenes, and the like. Such history can hardly be written with depth and authenticity through such 'personal' letters. This is rather personalized history, developing through the subjective method of literary creativity of the author into a product of imagination, introspection, research and observation. In fact, Nehru did not plan a serious history of the ancient civilization - in Greece, in Western Asia, in India, in China - with the details of discovered facts and with interpretations of the available records of history. In this context it is worth-while to quote here an important observation by a scholarly critic: "The trouble is that ancient history..."
history is a discipline. It is bread for the few, not cake for the masses. Its drama is that of a fragmentary picture only half-understood, set against utter darkness. Its pieces preserved by chance and set in place by years of devoted study of minute particulars.

In essence, however, the book—massive and epic—is an account of man's trial from an immemorable past to the present day. Deeply surcharged with emotion it contains the narrative of the tryst of mankind through endless ages with his fate and destiny. But it is much more than a narrative. What emerges from these historical testimonies is a quest, an attempt to unearth from the buried past the link in the chain of endless ideas, actions and events of man on this earth, and to discern in the process to what destiny man is inexorably leading himself. It is a great drama where both tragedy and comedy are enacted side by side or in succession as equally true. These long series of chapters contain the lifelike pictures as uncurtained before the great humanitarian author looking askance at the civilization in its organic entirety trying to understand and reveal its nature and significance. In fact, to Jawaharlal Nehru the world history is a great human Saga: the past and present are equally meaningful and jointly project towards a more meaningful future. As Nehru himself says in one of his letters in this series: 'I should have liked to take you on man's trail and follow it up from the early beginnings, when he was hardly a man, to to-day, when he prides himself so much, rather vainly and foolishly, on his great civilization.' Thus, the book Contd...
the book is simultaneously the story of a journey into the past and a search into the future. Nehru, however, makes an attempt to link up the fragments by invoking his own imagination as is the wont of authors of historical fictions of the Romantic age in English literature. The darkness which a historian cannot perhaps remove, the gaps which a research fellow cannot perhaps fill up, the poet or a creative writer can do comfortably with unlaboured artistry by the power of his romantic imagination. In the *Glimpses of World History* Jawaharlal Nehru as a writer has succeeded in this role in an extraordinary measure.

The civilization that man has built up with his own sweat and blood, with his dreams and ideas, bit by bit, making and unmaking and again fortifying over a period of thousands of years is therefore no doubt very dear and great. Even then, it is foolish and vain for man to pride on it, for this civilization is not a continuous process of peace and progress. Under the colourful carpet of this civilization on which man pretends on proud dialogues are hidden the endless account of dirt and spoil that man has created for himself over the long past.

An intensely optimistic Nehru can hardly afford to end 'his judgement on mankind by pointing to men's vain and foolish pride in the civilization which is his own creation. He feels in his innermost heart a great wonder and affection for man.'How amazing is this spirit of man!' exclaims Nehru in his *Discovery of India*. "God we may deny, but what hope is there for us if we deny man and thus reduce everything to futility?" The admiring Contd...
admiring attitude is romantic, hence basically a literary vision, rather than an objective historical reconstruction. The author reads his interpretation, meaning, significance into impersonal history of mankind.

This massive and great saga of the family of mankind stretched over endless years at both ends, therefore, deals with man, as individuals and as groups, races or masses and their endless actions and reactions, their dreams and ideas, their creations and destructions. And inevitably, over this colossal panorama everything is tinged with rays reflected from Nehru's own self. Facts, events are viewed through the powerful lens of a potent, rich personality. Very correctly has F. Lesny (Indo-Czechoslovak Society, Praha, Czechoslovakia) said: "I am specially struck by your comprehensive grasp of the main currents of World History, and by your personal attitude towards them. In addition to this there is a very warm personal touch in your letters." This warmth comes from emotion, sinquanen of literature, ray, of poetry.

It may even be stated that the author himself acts from behind as an important character in the world drama as designed by him. This element (to which Lesny refers as 'personal attitude') distinguishes the book from similar other world histories and lends to it a peculiar charm and fervour derived from the personality of the author which is invisible but functioning throughout the scenes and acts. This is more important than to state that Jawaharlal Nehru could not write objectively or with a non-attached attitude of a historian. The roots of the Contd..
of the literary merit of the book really lie in this area of Nehru's personal involvement, or the projection of himself in the mass of characters and events, art and culture, religion and philosophy, revolution, war and peace, assembled in this book on a very big platform.

On-wards from the chapter rather from the later one captioned The World War Begins the author has had his personal knowledge of the major world events and movements as these were within his lifetime. He ends on reaching the 'Shadow of War' that sparked off in 1939. This is the period of a very complex world of war, revolution, counter-revolution, 'Strange behaviour of Money', confusion of the Dollar, the Pound and the Rupee. The Conflict of Democracy, Dictatorship, Capitalism, Socialism is intensified, and even then 'Science goes on'. The earlier chapters upto 'The Victorian Age in England' consist more or less of a survey of the World from the time of the Hellenes and Ancient India and Old China upto the coming of Socialism side by side with the British concept of Commonwealth. Studies in the past form the principal matter in the book upto the period just preceding World War, 1914-18.

In this concourse come up great characters of the past, rulers, reformers and fighters, writers, thinkers and philosophers alike. There are great episodes of rise and fall of empires, of war and peace, or religion, art and culture, of the advent of
 advent of revolutionary social changes, of new ideas and thoughts, of science and technology. Linking all these into a homogeneous form runs the author's transcendental vision of a human civilization in which there should be the fullest scope for the blossoming of virtues and potentialities of man both as an individual and as a race.

Himself an indefatigable optimist, Nehru has honestly exposed the frailties of man as revealed in senseless warfare and brutality in successive ages in the history of civilization. But he does not confine his vision to the dark side only; he stretches himself to the fullest extent with a view to tracing in this history even the faintest sign of man's growth on new lines for the attainment of a more meaningful life on earth. Thus, a play of light and shadow goes on throughout the book, of hope and despair, of faith and frustration. Circumscribed by an affected psychology of the freedom-fighter in bondage, and writing under the shadow of international disorder and an approaching war, Nehru introduces an element of utopianism by which he wants to sustain man's self-confidence as the maker of his own destiny. Often an element of dream for a brighter to-morrow is revealed in different passages of the book, and in this he is inspired by a kind of romantic imagination of an idyllic poet than by impartial objectivity of a research historian. From the literary point of view, this element of romanticism in the context of wild realities of life in the decade of thirties emerges as the most fascinating and decorative aspect in Nehru's 'World History' in letters. It may be relevant...
to quote from him to exemplify the point:

"All these immemorable conflicts, political, economic, racial, darken the world today, and carry the shadow of war with them. It is said that the greatest of these conflicts, the most fundamental of them, is the one between imperialism and fascism on the one side and communism on the other. These face each other all over the world, and between them there is no room for compromise.

Feudalism, capitalism, socialism, syndicalism, marxism, communism — so many isms! And behind them all stalks opportunism! But there is also idealism for those who care to have it; not the idealism of empty fancies and an imagination run riot, but the idealism of working for a great human purpose, a great ideal which we seek to make real .......

Our incursions into history have shown us how the world has grown more and more compact, how different parts have come together and become interdependent. The world has indeed become one single inseparable whole, each part influencing, and being influenced by, the other. It is quite impossible now to have a separate history of nations. We have outgrown that stage, and only a single world history connecting the different threads from all the nations, and seeking to find the real forces that move them, can now be written with any useful purpose."

Written in 1933, when the world was in the process of disintegration through intense ultra-nationalism, such a vision... Contd...
as revealed in the paragraphs quoted above would sound as more sentimental wish of a dreamer aspiring for achieving a homogeneity of mankind united in every respect. Dreamers in all ages have dreamt of such resurgence to occur through the catastrophe that overtake man intermittently in history, and out of such dream great literature has been born which still remain; the fountain-source of hope and inspiration even when the overall atmosphere is cloudy and ominous. The concept of a happy new world grew in Nehru's mind from earlier years somewhat superficially and gradually it developed into a moving idea. Some observers even point out that Nehru's 'Socialism' was in fact a fond idea of his own uniting therein Marx's theories, Lenin's experiences, Gandhi's teachings and Nehru's own dreams. However, to trace the growth in his mind of the fancied idea of men living happily in an ideal land a few lines may be quoted for illustration's sake -from his letter to his sister, Krishna (Written in 1930):

"Therefore take yourself to a book-shop and choose some volumes containing the wisdom of the ancients, and the faith of the middle ages and the scepticism of the present, and glimpses of the glory that is to be, ....... And read these chosen volumes and out of them construct a magic city full of dream castles and flowering gardens and running brooks where beauty and happiness dwell and the ills that this sorry world of ours suffers from can gain no admittance. And life will then become one long and happy endeavour, ceaseless adventure, to build this city of magic and to drive away all the ugliness and misery around us."

Contd...
No doubt, it is a dream city - 'a magic city' - which can be constructed in imagination only. Yet it is interesting to note that this very fancied idea continues to grow in the writer's mind and eventually assumes new shapes apparently nearer the boundaries of realism, that is, in his upholding the cause of 'Socialism'.

But the most important point to note in this connection is Nehru's burning faith in a golden future for 'free' mankind and the creation on this earth by man's own tireless and devoted work a model living place for them. The utopian theme, a product of romantic imagination, as in Shelley, has been worked upon by Nehru, not by any conscious planning, but through artistic casualness, in various chapters of his 'Glimpses of World History'. This is the romantic's vision, no doubt, but in fact it is also the seeker's quest. One wonderful sentence may be quoted from *The Glimpses of World History*, which is purely lyrical in style and deeply romantic in content: "So from the earliest times until today man's quest has gone on and he has found out many things, but many still remain, and as he advances on his trail, he discovers vast new tracts stretching out before him, which show to him how far he is still from the end of his quest - if there is such an end." (P. 173).

The quest is for a meaning of life, and in a limited way the quest is also for a panacea by which to get rid of all

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of all evils so as to attain the completeness of life.

Man's future is in the womb of the present, and the present is nothing but the creation of the past. The need, therefore, exists for an examination and evaluation of the past record of human activities to facilitate a true perspective study of Man's life to-day and also to anticipate the world of to-morrow. Nehru's mind has roamed ceaselessly from place to place, from millennia back in the forgotten past to the immediate present and again towards the unborn and uncertain future. He has earnestly covered all the theatres of the great drama of human life on all parts of the world - Greece, Rome and Egypt, Iran, India and China of ancient times, and Europe and America, Russia and Japan in the modern times. Thus, in evaluating the literary merit of Nehru's writings, particularly in reference to this World History the critic will have to take note of these features which raise the book almost to the level of a modern Prose Epic. English literature has been enriched by the broad-based society novels and generation-novels of this century to which the critics grant unreservedly the essential qualities and features of classical epics. To explore the enormous varieties of life in tragedy and comedy and then evolve a pattern expounding human destiny governed by mysterious-almost elemental - tides of affairs rising from the source fountain of history, appear to be the common purpose of the epic writers of old and the epic-struck novelists of the present. Considering from the viewpoint of aim, approach, style and treatment Nehru's Glimpses of World History can be placed in the rank of

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of 'personalised History', a sub-specie of the modern Prose Epic.

While evaluating Nehru's world History Reference should be made in
particular to the broad canvas in time and space, the serious
treatment of men and events and the dignified prose style of the
writer.

Great Characters have been discussed side by side with
great events of history. Underlying this great assemblage of events
and characters is the quest for the significance of life's constant
struggle through the lessons of the past for transgressing the
limitations inherited from the past, of man's eternal urge for
liberty and progress, of the conflict raging through the ages
between war, violence, tragedy on one side and the illusive peace
and happiness on the other. In spite of all the tragedies that this
human species of God's creation has suffered and civilisations
built by him through centuries have crumbled, there is a burning
confirmation of life animating the long letterfuls of account of
the world and man upon it. The epic quality apart, the literary
and artistic values of The Glimpses of World History can be asse­
ssed by a careful study of the characters, the language and style,
events and episodes and the overflowing undercurrent of humanism
of the author.

In fact, many characters from the recorded history of the
world appear in the book like a galaxy, and the most shining among
them are such characters as Alexander the Great, Ashoka- the beloved
of gods, Chengiz Khan, Babar , Akbar, Napoleon, Bismark, Trotsky,
Lenin, Mustafa Kemal, Gandhi, Mussolini, Hitler and others.

Dominant position certainly they held in history and influenced the course of human civilization. At the same time one is deeply moved by Jawaharlal's concern (in this romantic history) for mankind in general and not the patrician heroes only. He says: "But history is not just a record of the doings of big men, of kings and emperors and the like. .... Real history should deal, not with a few individuals here and there, but with the people who make up a nation— who work and by their labour produce the necessaries and luxuries of life, and who in a thousand different ways act and react on each other. Such a history of man would really be a fascinating story.

........ It is the story of man's struggle for a living." From this struggle has grown our civilization and man's dreams of happiness, peace and perfection. But all the three are elusive, and the sensitive writer often feels pained and disillusioned. In great compassion for humanity Nehru writes: "All this happens, and people boast of our enlightened and progressive age, and of the wonders of our modern civilization and of our great culture and science; and yet the poor remain poor and miserable, and great nations fight each other and slaughter millions; and great countries like our own are ruled by an alien people". This very sincere humanism is at the top of Nehru's mind, and, again and again, touching and moving passages relating to the common man working through ages silently, yet incessantly for the making of human civilization appear in his writings, as in this World History. It is only Nehru who can exclaim: "How amazing is this spirit of man!" And at the

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at the same time the major character-sketches in the book also
deserve special appreciation from the viewpoint of the deep signi-
ficance they cast upon the author's attitude towards these great
personalities who influenced history of mankind in successive
ages. While dealing with the great characters, the author's lan-
guage and prose-style are varied in this book, at some places
smooth, melodious and lyrical, elsewhere vigorous, captivating and
enthralling, but nowhere weak and pedestrian.

World History will no doubt present a portrait gallery
of interesting and attractive characters, big and small, who by
their thought and action left permanent impress on the vast pano-
rama of time. But the picture of each is changeable depending upon
the attitude and mood of the artist. Often there are discrepancies
and the reason is ineradicable.

Amazing is the contradiction in Nehru's portrayal of
Alexander the Great, Changiz Khan and Napoleon. Coming in different
and dissimilar ages they had exhibited wonderful personalities and
achieved wonders in terms of war and victory the memory of which
are even now equally inspiring and provoking.

Of Alexander he writes in letter No. 17: "Whether
Alexander was a really great man or not is a doubtful matter. He
is certainly no hero of mine. But he succeeded in a short life in
impressing his name on two continents, and in history he is supposed
to be the first of the world-conquerers."

Contd...
On Napoleon he writes in letter No. 104: "What manner of man was Napoleon, then? — ..... Courage he had and self-confidence and imagination and amazing energy and vast ambition. He was a very great general, a master of the art of war, comparable to the great captains of old-Alexander and Changiz." Again in letter No. 105: "It is difficult to judge a great and extraordinary man; and that Napoleon was great in his own way and extraordinary there can be no doubt. He was elemental, almost like a force of Nature. Full of ideas and imagination, he was yet blind to the value of ideals and unselfish motives." Again, in the same letter: "He had the magnetism of the great, and he won devoted friendship from many. His glance, like Akbar's, was magnetic."

Language is lavish on Napoleon. Language is much restrained in the case of Alexander. The author even goes a bit off from his habitual generosity when he writes in language as quoted below:—

"So died Alexander at the age of thirty-three. What had this 'great' person done during his brief career? He won some brilliant battles. He was undoubtedly a great general. But he was vain and conceited, and sometimes very cruel and violent. He thought of himself as a God. In fits of anger or whims of the moment he killed some of his best friends, and destroyed great cities together with their inhabitants. He left nothing solid behind him in his empire — not even proper roads — that he had built. Contd..."
Like a meteor in the sky he came and went, and left little of himself behind him except a memory.

The terms, phrases and small sentences reveal a negative attitude of the author to this great character. Lack of sympathy is easily noticeable. Alexander's vaingloriousness inspire of his greatness as a conquering General has been compared so aptly to a meteor. Short duration and suddenness of appearance and disappearance can also be linked to the concept of a meteor and the idea has a continuance from the very first sentence of the passage. Again, a major point is scored by the phrase 'not even proper roads', because it at once brings the character and the entire context into the touch of direct reality of man's daily life. But, Nehru's aversion to Alexander - 'He is certainly no hero of mine' - seems inexplicable. Was it due to the violence, bloodshed and destruction that Alexander had caused during conquests?

In what respect was Napoleon superior? - He rose from the ashes of France after the great Revolution. The supremacy that he could attain at a very young age in comparable to a meteoric rise. He too was conquest-minded. Like Alexander he too marched to the south across the Mediterranean. In Europe his movements were much more devastating and of much wider coverage; he marched eastwards deep inside Russia. Of this Napoleon, writes Nehru:

"Child of Revolution he was, and yet he dreamt of vast empire, and the conquests of Alexander filled his mind. Even Europe seemed small. The East lured him, and espe- Contd..."
especially Egypt and India."

Thus, in Napoleon the author finds Alexander-like ambition, the same spirit of adventure and conquest, his achievements in war, and similar other wonderful feats. The author himself draws parallel references to Alexander while writing on certain distinctive features of Napoleon's career. Even then, there can be no doubt that Nehru is highly enamoured of Napoleon and while writing in The Glimpses of World History he is dominated by a positive attitude towards this great hero of France's History. Occasionally the language in which he writes is surcharged with commending sympathy:

"All Europe trembled at his name and was dominated by him as it has never been dominated by anyone else before or since. Marengo (This was in 1800, when he crossed with his army the Great St. Bernard Pass in Switzerland, all covered with the winter snow), Ulm, Austerlitz, Jena, Eylau, Friedland, Wagram, are the names of some of his famous victories on land. Austria, Prussia and Russia all collapsed before him. Spain, Italy, the Netherlands a great part of Germany called the confederation of the Rhine, Poland called now Duchy of Warsaw, were all subject states. The old Holy Roman Empire, which had long existed in name only, was finally ended."

To assess the quality of this writing it may be useful to borrow language as follows: "His prose is swift and tightly
tightly packed, almost too swift, too tightly packed. It outruns the reader ....... "(Mr. Erwine on George Bernard Shaw). The impact of the chosen words and phrases is inescapable: 'All Europe trembled at his name'; 'Dominated' comes twice to fit in with 'before or since'; the passing of the St. Bernard Pass is highlighted specially by 'all covered with the winter snow', and the 'Holy Roman Empire' meets with its 'final end'. Besides, the peculiar and enchanting names of historic places, unknown and unfamiliar to the present-day reader, are almost conjured up by a magic pen to add a mysterious charm to the hero of such 'famous victories of land'.

This 'rollcall' of proper names has epic grandeur like the geographical and mythological names in Paradise Lost. It is quite relevant and reasonable to take the passage as an expansion of Nehru's earlier tribute to Napoleon: 'He was elemental, almost like a force of Nature'. The romantic association in a poet's mind of the idea of an elemental force of Nature with the idea of an irrepressible adventurist spirit in life cannot be lost sight of in this context.

The spirit of adventure and the flair for limitless ideas (not limitless power, as in Napoleon) were the very traits of Nehru's own character, and, therefore, his inner self cannot resist the temptation of responding to the great joyous tuning of life aroused and nurtured by ambition and adventure. In 'Man and Superman' writes Bernard Shaw: "This is the true joy of life, the being used for a purpose recognised by yourself as a mighty one; ....... the being a force of Nature instead of a feverish, selfish little phlegm of ailments complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy'.

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Thus, a support can be lent to Nehru's treatment of 'Napoleon' character in *The Glimpses of World History*. But the contradiction in approach to the two great figures - Alexander the Great and Emperor Napoleon - in two vastly distant and different ages remain mainly unexplained. While Napoleon is almost a hero to him, the attitude to Alexander is quite the reverse; Alexander is no hero of Nehru. Are these two different postures on a similar subject really compatible, even from the literary point of view? - one may ask. Villain or a hero, each is good enough for dramatic treatment. Contradiction has been rightly claimed to be a peculiar and valuable feature of Nehru mind and personality.

It may be useful to discuss in this context the sketch of Chengiz Khan by Nehru. The Mongol nomads of central Asia were united under the leadership of Chengiz, originally named Bagatur, and this united force under the great leader conquered China, subdued Russia, 'wiped off completely Baghdad and its empire and achieving victory after victory marched upon Europe itself. 'There was none to stop them'. So sudden and irresistible was their thrust that the European world was taken by awe and amazement. 'It almost seemed like a great natural calamity, like an earthquake, before which man can do little'. All this happened under the unparalleled leadership of Chengiz Khan, writes Nehru. As in the case of Napoleon here too Nehru writes in a language of sympathy and with an attitude of tacit support. A few quotations will be revealing:

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"Although just a little boy of ten, with no one to help him, he struggled on and on, and ultimately made good."

...  ...

"The Mongols were nomads, hating cities and the ways of cities. If they won great victories on the field of battle, it was not because of their numbers, but because of their discipline and organization. And above all it was due to the brilliant captainship of Chengiz. For, Chengiz is, without doubt, the greatest military genius and leader in history. Alexander and Caesar seem petty before him."

...  ...

What about the death and destruction caused by the Conquests of this 'greatest military genius'? Mehru has given a vivid account of the same: "This march, begun in 1219, opened the eyes of Asia, and partly of Europe too, to this new terror, this great roller which came on inexorably, crushing down cities and towns of Sokhara, full of palaces, and with over a million population was reduced to ashes. Samarquand, the capital, was destroyed, and out of a million people that lived there, only 50,000 remained alive. Herat, Balkh and many other flourishing cities were all destroyed. Millions were killed. All the arts and crafts that had flourished in Central Asia for hundreds of years disappeared, civilized life seemed to cease in Persia and in Central Asia, there was desert where Chengiz had passed."

Contd...
Reasonably enough, such acts of barbarity and crime against humanity easily demolish the image of the greatest military genius but the author seeks for some reasons in explanation. At one place he writes thus: "He had the spirit of a nomad, and he hated towns and cities. He liked living in steppes or great plains. At one time Chengiz considered the desirability of destroying all the cities in China, but fortunately he desisted. His idea was to combine civilization with nomadic life. But this was not, and is not, possible." Despite the last sentence, the language of the entire passage betrays the writer's defensive attitude.

But in a similar context Nehru uses aggressive language about Alexander, who also like Chengiz made long marches for achieving great conquests and on the way caused destruction. Nehru's duality is vividly represented in the treatment of Alexander for such devastations of warfare that he had led in Greece, Persia or Central Asia. Nehru writes as follows:

"One Greek City, Thebes, rebelled against him, and he struck at it with great cruelty and violence. He destroyed this famous city and knocked down its buildings and sold many thousands into slavery. By this barbarous behaviour he terrified Greece. But this and other instances of barbarism in his life do not make him admirable for us and only repel and disgust us."

Switching over to Chengiz Khan, Nehru immediately...
discovers a new language to describe the inner person in Chengiz that fascinates him. Attitude to religion has been a great criterion to judge great personalities of the old world history. In regard to Chengiz Nehru writes: "Chengiz was a very tolerant person in religion. His religion, such as it was, was Shamaism, a worship of the 'Everlasting Blue Sky'. He used to have long talks with Chinese Tao-ist Sages, but he stuck to Shamaism, and when in difficulty, consulted the sky". In three sentences of melodious prose Chengiz is raised to sky-high limits inspite of the fact that he had reduced to ashes 'the great city of Bokhara, full of palaces and with over a million population.' How to explain the apparent contradiction in approach? Probably, in one simple sentence Nehru seeks to give the answer: 'But the man fascinates me.' Here is no objective historian's attitude, but temper of a poet all compact with romance and love of a Bohemian character.

Similarly, Napoleon has had a great spell on Nehru, and Napoleon too as a man struck Nehru's imagination. The tragic life of such a great hero of all times in exile at St. Helena (and suffering ill-treatment and humiliation at the hands of the British Governor) evokes deep sympathy of the author. The language in which Nehru has recorded this tragic situation is a measure of his indignation at and denunciation of the English Government of the day. He writes: 'The English Governor of the island was an extraordinarily uncouth and barbarous person, and he treated Napoleon very shabbily. ..... He was not allowed to communicate with friends in Europe, not even with his little son, whom, in the days of his
of his power, he had given the title of King of Borne. Indeed, even news of his son was not allowed to reach him. "The interest being human and in individual life and not in broader forces in the destiny of nations, is essentially literary in character. The tragedy is almost soul-stirring, and Nehru makes an indictment against the English Government of the day in one sentence: 'It is surprising how meanly Napoleon was treated.' The writer, as an artist, is committed, rather than maintains a delicate balance in his moral judgement as an historian is expected to do. To some scholars, Nehru's writing on Napoleon is influenced by bias, to some others there are signs of sentimentality, Shelleyan or Dickensian, as in a sentence like this: 'He died in 1821, and even after death he was pursued by the hatred of the Governor, and a wretched grave was provided for him.' Frankly, the grave, good or bad, could not alter the fact of Napoleon's great sufferings in exile,—for five and a half years he endured this living death in St. Helena. Edward Thompson, who had personal intimacy with Nehru, wrote in a letter dated May, 3, 1937: 'I am sure the worst section of the book is that which describes Napoleon. I confess I simply cannot understand your Napoleon-worship. Those pages seem to me just white-washing.... And it seems to me surprising that you have taken all that Napoleon-worship and St. Helena Martyr's staff so seriously.' Prime facie, such criticism may appear convincing because Nehru's admiration for Napoleon as a great hero of world history is obvious all through. But, on a closer analysis, convincing evidence is traceable in his writing to establish that Nehru's fascination for Napoleon.
Napoleon was more for the author's own great qualities of head and heart, and concern for the common man. 'Napoleon was great in his own way and extraordinary' and he was 'full of ideas and imagination' - so writes Nehru. And surely the author who is himself 'full of ideas and imagination' is stimulated by the image of Napoleon's character.

This myriad-coloured personality would arouse emotional feelings of attachment to anyone with an artistic inclination, and so writes Nehru:

"Soon afterwards, Napoleon won the Battle of the Pyramids. He was fond of dramatic poses. Riding in front of his troops before the Pyramids he addressed them: 'Soldiers, forty centuries are looking down upon you!"

Seen in another posture: "Indeed, he was known to lie down on the ground in the middle of a battle and sleep for half an hour or so and then get up for another long spell of intensive work". Again, to emphasize the same feature: "In his personal life he was simple, and never indulged in any excesses, except excess of work ....... It was this simple life which gave him splendid health and vast energy. He could sleep when he liked and as little as he liked. To ride 100 miles in the course of the morning and afternoon was not an extraordinary thing for him."

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This fascination of dramatic postures in the hero, approaching
in a sense the Byronic brooding, betrays the literary temper of a
romantic poet.

About his political ambition and fate: 'It is very strange how this man, who towered above his generation in some ways, fell a victim to the empty glamour which the old idea of kingship exercised. And yet, often enough, he spoke in terms of revolution and made fun of these effete kings. He had deliberately turned his back on the Revolution and the new order; the old order neither suited him nor was it prepared to have him. So between the two he fell.'

Nehru conceives of Napoleon as a man of ambition and compassion simultaneously: 'Circumstances were too much for his - his vaulting ambition, the ease with which he triumphed in war, and the hatred of the rulers of Europe for this upstart and their fear of him, which allowed him no peace to settle down. He was reckless in sacrificing human lives in battle, and yet it is said that the sight of suffering greatly moved him.' Such characteristic contradictions in a great hero strike very impressive and interesting to an artist like Nehru.

And with a grand touch Nehru places Napoleon at a very high altar commanding both respect and sympathy: 'In the days of his greatness he was too much of a man of action to be a philosopher. He worshipped only at the altar of power; his real
real and only love was power, and he loved it not crudely but as an artist." This idealization of the controversial historical character is in the manner of over simplification by a literary artist.

Thus, Nehru has been able to draw up a superb image of Napoleon in a very compelling prose which at places rises to an intense poetic level. One can almost hear a deep sigh of tragic sympathy of the author in this one sentence on his fancied hero: 'So Napoleon fell, and it was as well that he fell.' So would Shakespeare feel about the tragedy of Macbeth.

Nehru's characterization of Chengiz and Napoleon, of Ashok and Akbar, of Bismarck and Mussolini, of Lenin and Stalin and of Gandhi provides the scope for a discussion of his real idea about such great personalities who continue to tower so tall in the panorama of the history of mankind from ancient times to our day. The idea of a historical ego cannot possibly be dismissed. Cross-currents of affairs in a country slowly but inexorably prepare the ground for the crystallization of the ego of a whole nationality at a particular and critical phase of its existence, and for that ego to be satisfied in the personality of a hero who symbolizes roughly the essential totality of the common upheaval. The magic succeeds when the hero symbolizing the historical ego has proved himself graceful to the writer and struck the correct chord in his mind. Besides the big characters cited above Nehru has harped on the same theme in many other characters of relatively

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relatively local importance. In letter No. 91 he writes about Shivaji: "... and you must know how Shivaji is loved and adored by the people there. He represented a religious-nationalist revival of the kind I have already mentioned. The economic breakdown and general misery of the people prepared the soil, and two great Marathi poets, Ramdas and Tukaram, nurtured this soil by poetry and hymns. The Maratha people thus gained in consciousness and unity, and just then came a brilliant captain to lead them to victory."

Similar suggestions, although not in the same language, have been made by the author in respect of Mustafa Kemal who became the Ataturk, in respect of Mussolini who became the all-powerful dictator of Italy, in respect of Hitler also in a way.

An observation by Martin Scoot in his book 'Medieval Europe' is worth considering in this context. He writes: "Men who catch the imagination of a whole age do so either by embodying the ideals of that age uniquely well or by flouting it equally conspicuously...." In his depiction of the characters as discussed above, and to be discussed hereinafter (Gandhi), Nehru has possibly tried to suggest that men who catch the imagination of an age build their way up not merely by embodying the ideals of the age but by fanning the lingering smoke into a great conflagration, and the test of their ability lies in this sphere of action. The hero is the creation of the age as much as he recreates the situations of the age to suit his goal

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his goal and movement. And, again, as in the Greek Tragedies, in their very ideal, goal and movement these heroes of history, in the very process of achieving greatness, sow the seeds of their exhaustion and fall. Exceptions are there no doubt, and how respectfully has Nehru pointed the glorious pictures of Ashok and Akbar! That Nehru is deeply attracted to and influenced by both, Ashok and Akbar, these can be no doubt, and that explains to some extent his reverent treatment of these two characters in *The Glimpses of World History*.

Surprisingly, in this book Kehru appears very much restrained in his discussion of Ashoka, for whom his personal wonder and esteem was perhaps limitless. In a chapter of just a little more than three pages with a sober caption, 'Ashoka, the Beloved of The Gods', the author has shown little emotion and his description of Ashoka is mostly based on 'the numerous edicts which were carved out in the rock or on metal'. Had he not quoted from E.G.Wells, perhaps, the chapter would have remained weak as an account of Ashoka the Emperor, ruler, reformer or a man 'of the gods.' It may even appear that the author wanders on the surface only and does not go deep into the soul of the character; language too is comparatively weak at places when the subject-matter is of far-reaching importance, as for instance, the situation in Ashoka's life-history is written simply as:

"With the desire, perhaps, of bringing into his empire the remaining parts in the south-east and south, he

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he started the conquest of Kalinga in the ninth year of his region. Kalinga was on the east coast of India, between the Mahanadi, Godavari and Kistna rivers. The people of Kalinga fought bravely, but they were ultimately subdued after terrible slaughter. This war and slaughter affected Ashoka so deeply that he was disgusted with war and all its work. Henceforth there was to be no war for him."

The transformation of the hero's character poses the greatest problem to the artist. Here, in the case of Ashoka's character too the episode should have a revealing importance, as if Ashoka is reborn at this stage, a break with the past is completed and a powerful new course starts to flow in Ashoka's own career as well as in the career of the entire nation. The depth, importance and seriousness of the situation and the involvement of the character finds little echo in the writing quoted above. The treatment of the character is rather superficial and therefore the element of historical / ego in the character has not been worked out at all.

Akbar comes nearest to Ashoka, in Nehru's estimate, when their attitude towards religious tolerance and national integration is examined.

Akbar's attitude of religious toleration, magnanimity and broad-based Indianness came to him not out of any mental conflict or outward conflicts as in the case of Ashoka. It was natural to his character, because had he wished otherwise there was no power in India at that time to challenge him, for Akbar was then at the pinnacle of his power and glory." He was very autocratic and had
and had uncontrolled power. There seems to have been no whisper in India then of checking a ruler's power." - writes Nehru. Thus Akbar was rather great in religious and ethical approach to life by transcending the limits to thought and action imposed by the traditional religiosity of the age.

In such poetically charged prose, Nehru has given full vent to his intense feelings of praise and pleasure, as if he is looking at a great sight of beauty and nobility. The inherent romanticism does not escape the notice of a serious critic. Even such a significant expression like : 'Is it any wonder...... that this most royal and manly figure should tower high above the crowds of men who have been but kings ?' can be linked to the sense of reverence of a romanticist who draws sustenance from the old objects of wonder when the environment around him fails to satisfy his artistic susceptibilities.

Akbar was just the reverse of Ashoka in regard to kindly ambition, martial aggressiveness, worldliness and love of pomp and grandeur. This aspect has been drawn in clear outline in masterly strokes : 'I have compared him to Ashoka, but do not be misled by comparison. In many ways he was unlike him. He was very ambitious, and to the end of his days he was a conqueror, intent on extending his empire.' And the quintessence of Akbar's character as a Grand Moghul has been put in as follows : "Akbar was the very essence of authoritarianism."
Nehru seems to lay his hand more often on the brighter colours and finer brushes in drawing up the 'Akbar portrait'. In his use of words and phrases he is more emotional and eloquent when writing about Akbar. Such a passage as quoted here from The Glimpses of World History is indeed revealing not only of Akbar's greatness but also of Nehru's mental susceptibility: "But great men have something besides these qualities: they have, it is said, a magnetism which draws people to them. Akbar had this personal magnetism and charm in an abundant measure; his compelling eyes were, in the wonderful description of the Jesuits, 'Vibrant like the sea in sunshine'. Is it any wonder that this man should fascinate us still, and that his most royal and manly figure should tower high above the crowds of men who have been but kings?"

However, one consistency he retains as a writer who is seized of the concept of consummation in one great personality of the energy and spirit of the age. The author has centered round the idea while dealing with characters of chengiz, Napoleon, Shivasl in the distant past and Gandhi in modern history. He comes back to the same idea in Ashoka and Akbar also, with some difference. Here the difference lies in the stress upon the benign developments in the body politic of which the hero becomes the all-important mobilizing and motivating force. The historical ego concept appears here in a different colour; collective benevolence is both Ashok and Akbar shown as the basic tenet of regal philosophy for which however, does not fit in with the ego.

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concept as discussed hereinbefore in respect of Napoleon, Chengiz and Shivaji. Nehru writes with feelings and reverence on this particular issue of commonness between Ashok and Akbar.

"Akbar's name stands out in Indian History, and sometimes and in some ways, he reminds one of Ashoka. It is a strange thing that a Buddhist Emperor of India of the third century before Christ, and a Muslim Emperor of India of the sixteenth century after Christ should speak in the same voice. One wonders if this is not perhaps the voice of India herself speaking through two of her great sons."

In all these great characters perhaps he tries to hear the echo of his own throbings of life, his idealism, aspirations, dreams and joys,—and sorrows also. He too has endeavoured to live historically, to give expression to the voice of India, to give a shape and direction to the vaguely felt ideas of the age." He also tries to benefit from his own heroes of history,—adopting some of their ways of judgement and action, assimilating some of their thought and language. Nehru's adventurous spirit and readiness for great action and sacrifice have been very finely and truly expressed in the following few sentences by himself:

"None of us can say what and when we can achieve. We cannot commend success. But success often comes to those who dare and act; it seldom goes to the timid who are ever afraid of the consequences. We play for high stakes, and if we seek to

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to achieve great things it can only be through great dangers. Whether we succeed soon or fate none but ourselves can stop us from high endeavour and from writing a noble page in our country's long and splendid history.

It is, therefore, cogent to conclude that in his attempt to draw up the important characters of world history Nehru was deeply concerned with the transcendental factor attending the thoughts and deeds of such personalities, the factor of their relevance to the age they represented, how far they were symbols of their country in a particular period of history aspiring and striving to achieve some a certain noble objective of destiny.